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HEADLINE: Playing field upgrade in works

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BODY:

Del. Michael Busch is organizing a community effort to spend as much as \$ 500,000 to renovate the largest open space in Annapolis.

Mr. Busch, special assistant to the director of county parks and recreation, wants to make the 36 acres of playing fields at Germantown Elementary School and the adjacent Phoenix school a better place to play.

"This is a project near and dear to my heart," said Mr. Busch, D-Annapolis.

It's also something county schools and the sports community have been hoping for. The fields are owned by the Board of Education.

"It needs to be improved for playability and safety," said Tory Salvia, commissioner of the Optimists Club youth baseball league.

The fields are used by students, soccer and lacrosse players from numerous city and county leagues, and people just looking for a place to play.

"If you go out there any night in the fall, spring or summer, it's just loaded with kids," said Fred Kramer, recreation administrator for city Parks and Recreation.

Mr. Busch is organizing a January meeting among school officials and representatives from the Annapolis Recreation Council, city and county parks and recreation, and neighboring community associations to come up with an improvement plan.

"There probably won't be any real dramatic changes," Mr. Busch said.

Instead, he foresees most will be grading work to make the fields more level.

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"There's a lot of dead space out there," Mr. Kramer said, including an old patch of blacktop with no basketball hoop.

While the county will help the city acquire funds from the state's Program Open Space for the project, Mr. Busch said he wants the city to be the project leader.

He said he'd like for a plan to be in place by May, so the project can be budgeted for the next fiscal year.

Work could begin as early as fall 1997, and be finished by spring 1998.

Input from recreation groups and the community is essential, but Mr. Busch said the needs of the two schools will be the first priority.

Mr. Salvia, a member of the Annapolis Recreation Council, agreed that the fields must be able to accommodate a number of uses.

"It's the last big space in Annapolis we really have for kids," he said.

"(But) we definitely would like to see a baseball diamond out there," he added.

The space, which has been used for athletics since before the 1950s, once had a baseball diamond, Mr. Salvia said.

A flag pole now stands in the middle of what used to be center field.

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